

Introduction

(Updated in 2011)

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Overview

The Town of Plaistow is located in Rockingham County in southeastern New Hampshire adjacent to the Massachusetts border. The population of Plaistow as of the 2010 census was 7,609.

This territory was part of the 1642 land purchase that was Haverhill, Massachusetts. When the New Hampshire-Massachusetts boundary was established in 1741, the portion north of the border became the Haverhill District. The Town was incorporated as Plastow in 1749, and included Atkinson, which was separated in 1767. The spelling was changed later.



The name "Plaistow" may have come from the English "plaistowe," meaning "an open space or greenwood, near the center of a village where the maypole stood and where sports at holiday times were carried on."

Plaistow is located at the crossroads of several major highway corridors including Route 125, Route 121A, Route 121 and Route 108. Travelers can take both Route 125 and Route 108 all the way to the Rochester area while users of Route 121A and Route 121 can travel west all the way to the City of Manchester. Heading south, Routes 121A and 121 merge with Route 125 in Haverhill, Massachusetts which then joins with Interstate 495. Route 108 also joins with Interstate 495 in Haverhill.

The system of roadways has also stimulated commercial growth along these highway corridors – most notably Route 125. Consequently, Plaistow has become primarily a residential community with substantial amounts of commercial development located on major highways.

Plaistow's land use reflects natural, historical, and cultural factors. The pattern of existing land use in Plaistow is reflective of the town's small town character and its role as an historical crossroads between the southeastern New Hampshire and northern Massachusetts. The development of the town has been shaped by a variety of natural, historical and cultural factors and more recently by the control of development through zoning and other land use regulations. The traditional settlement pattern that has defined Plaistow's character consists of rural residential development, multiple commercial centers located along major transportation corridors, scattered industrial sites and large tracts of undeveloped land located throughout the entire town.

Purpose of the Master Plan

The Plan serves many purposes. It presents and analyzes the social, economic, environmental and physical characteristics of the community. It takes into account the distribution of population and housing, capacity of public facilities, and the amounts of the various categories of land. The Master Plan also provides a means to coordinate land development with Town facilities, including recreation, police, fire and highways, as well as other services provided by the Town. It expresses the rationale and broad principles that serve as guidelines to the Planning Board, the Board of Selectmen and other town boards, commissions, and committees as they plan for the future.

The Planning Board is authorized under the provisions of RSA 674 et seq. to develop a vision and strategy, in the form of a Master Plan, to guide the future growth of the community. Most important, without it, the Town would not be able to enact the zoning ordinance and land use regulations that are utilized daily and which are the basis of short and long-term development. The Master Plan, zoning ordinance and land use regulations address the need to integrate and balance the rights of the individual landowner with restrictions that are designed to protect the rights of many. Land-use regulations also help promote orderly growth and protect the larger community from the actions of individuals.

One of the primary responsibilities of local governments in New Hampshire is to provide an adequate level of community facilities and services for its residents and businesses. The availability and quality of these services are often major factors in determining the quality of life and general character of a community. The availability of quality community facilities and services also affects how the land in town will be used in the future. It is important to consider the effect population and economic growth will have on a town's ability to provide essential community facilities for its present and future residents.

The 2004 Update

The 2004 Master Plan Update was a significant overhaul of the 1988 Master Plan and associated minor updates made in 1995 and 1997. The 2004 Master Plan was prepared with assistance by Appledore Engineering, a consulting firm out of Portsmouth, NH. In addition, various subcommittees provided guidance and input including participation in a community forum and response to a questionnaire survey. The goal of the survey was to acquire a sense of how Plaistow residents feel about their community, what they feel are the Town's strengths and weaknesses, what is special about Plaistow, and how they would like to see the community develop in the future. The results of this survey provided important input and guided the Planning Board philosophically. At the Community Forum held in May of 2001, residents identified issues and likes related to Transportation, Community Facilities, and Land Use.

The 2004 Master Plan Update brought everything up to date with respect to the growing and changing needs of the community. Similar to the 1988 Plan, this document includes sections that pertain to all facets of the planning process and contains maps, diagrams, graphs and charts. It incorporated current data, philosophy and citizen opinion.

The 2011 Update

Since 2004, updates have been made to various chapters of the Master Plan, including the Vision and Population and Housing Chapters. These updates have been ongoing and are not yet officially adopted by the Planning Board. Because it has been seven years since the last major update, the Planning Board has been taking an aggressive approach to updating the entire document.

Challenges and Opportunities

Although Plaistow is not one of the largest communities in the region in terms of population, its proximity to the Massachusetts border and the presence of NH Route 125 have combined to give the Town an urban aspect often found in communities with 3 to 5 times the population. In addition, many local residents commute to northern Massachusetts for employment. This situation presents Plaistow with both opportunities and challenges with respect to transportation and service issues. For example, this higher level of urbanization is accompanied by concerns

such as traffic congestion and loss of rural character. However, there is also increased opportunity for public transportation, economic development, and infrastructure improvements such as sidewalks and bike paths. Finding an appropriate balance between these opportunities and challenges is one of the goals of this Master Plan and a long-term goal for Plaistow.

The anticipated amount and type of future residential and non-residential development in Plaistow will influence the level of community facilities required by the town. As the Town's residential and commercial base increases, the Town continues to need to allocate additional resources to specific community facilities and services.

Plaistow's natural resources are a critical consideration in establishing a proper approach for land planning and management. Understanding natural resource values provides a rational basis for determining which areas of the Town are more appropriate for protection and open space and which areas are more suitable for development. Natural resources such as slope, soils, vegetation, wildlife and water resources add to Plaistow's character, provide recreational opportunities and contribute to the quality of life for Plaistow's residents. These natural resources also provide both opportunities and constraints for growth. Steep slopes and wetlands, for example, while better drained, are less suitable for development; flatter areas are more suitable. On the other hand, these well-drained areas may be associated with groundwater areas that require protection. Thus, the natural resource base of Plaistow provides an important factor as the basis for local land use decisions.

The proper balance of land use development versus preservation of the character of Plaistow is what this Master Plan seeks to provide.